# The Smart Nigerian Girl: Leadership Strategies for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract**

An early mission of British colonialism in Africa involved reinforcing rigid ideologies to redefine the African woman. Although the British had a West African presence dating as far back as the seventeenth century, Nigeria's inauguration in the early 1900s was characterized by the rapid and violent imposition of European values and systems. For the Nigerian woman, this meant that her former participation in public spheres became restricted to the privacy of her home. Where they were once involved in decision-making and commerce, the arrival of the British colonial officials and their wives confined the Nigerian woman's role to the domestic space. Girlhood and adolescent girls' education, then, became a prime locus for indoctrination into British standards of middle-class femininity. Now, in the post-independence era, development specialists are asserting that the empowerment of women—and, as I will argue, restoration of their identities—is key to rebuilding the economic, social, and political sectors of any society. In this regard, contesting gender disparities in primary and secondary education has emerged as a development strategy. However, much attention is given solely to access to education, without consideration of how gendered education may constrain girls' ability to participate in a capacity that is fulfilling to themselves and beneficial for their society. In Nigeria, where the effects of colonialism have created a void in effective leadership, the trajectory of the nation's prosperity is contingent upon the re-education of girls into revolutionary understandings of their personal and social identities.

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To God be all the glory!

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# INTRODUCTION

An Igbo proverb tells us that "a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body" (Achebe 1). The rain that beat Africa initially began with the continent's first encounter with Europeans five hundred years ago, and persisted through the Berlin Conference of 1885. I propose that British colonialism raged a particular storm upon Nigeria's women, the effects of which are still eroding the fabric that knits together many African societies today. If we ever hope to understand how we arrived at the disorder of present-day Nigeria, we must first revisit early efforts by the British to reset the rules of African societies.

In the early 1900s, the British made observations about the remarkable nature of the Nigerian woman. At a time when the scope of the British woman's contribution to European society was being rigidly defined, what the British saw in Nigeria startled them. They quickly found that 1) the people as a whole were proving impossible to rule; and 2) the women were rebellious and rioting all over the place" (Amadiume 13). Mrs. Leith-Ross, the wife of a colonial officer who was sent to conduct studies in the southern Igbo provinces, initially thought the Igbo

woman to be a "nearly untutored savage" (44). By the conclusion of her studies, she described Igbo women as such:

> … This rare, and invaluable force, thousands upon thousands of ambitious, go-ahead, courageous, self-reliant, hardworking, independent women…[with] their startling energy, their power of organization and of leadership, their practical common sense and quick apprehension of reality (Leith-Ross 337).

What became of this "rare and invaluable force?" It was an early mission of British colonialism to redefine the African woman by exporting European ideologies into an environment that was built to function efficiently without them. As educational opportunities in Europe were expanding for women and girls, the British quickly identified the girl-child's education in Africa as a point of entry through which they could pervade and consequently deconstruct African systems and institutions.

Some would argue that at least the British introduced education to a previously ignorant population, but this is untrue. It is important at this point to clarify the definition of education—it is a process of socialization through systematic instruction and training. The type of education imposed by the British mirrors Paulo Freire's "banking concept of education" in which "the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing; the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; [and] the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it" (54). Although informal, Africans possessed their own modes of educating their people and the British intended to unhinge this by implementing their own structure. This brings about a critical question. If education is a form of training, into what (or rather, *whom*) did the British desire to train African girls to be? To answer this, we must fa-

miliarize ourselves with the British woman—commended for her patience, orderliness, restraint, and obedience. She has been and continues to be the prevailing standard the British used to re-establish the role of women in Nigerian society.

The concept of women's role is discussed frequently throughout feminist circles and, more recently, among development specialists as necessary for sustainable change. Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines role as "an assigned or assumed character" and "a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process" ("Role" 1). It is the way(s) in which one interacts with and participates in their environment (through activity, behavior, or traits) in their quest to fulfill a predetermined level of self-actualization. In regards to women's role, it is how actively she engages with shaping the reality of the world around her. To better understand the perspective from which I speak throughout the course of this paper, I want to analogize women's role in society with the responsibilities of an actress in a production. Actresses are commonly told: "don't break character!" There is limited freedom in what the actress can do with her assigned character, because the director has already decided what qualities define the character, and what essential part she plays in how the story unfolds. If the actress strays too far from the script, she derails the operation. Thus, the director has a vested interest in ensuring the actress maintains her role, lest she threaten the director's ability to maintain power.

The actress is the Nigerian woman, cast by the British colonial administration for the role of the white, middle-class woman. Despite her best efforts, the Nigerian actress' depiction of a white woman never seems to satisfy the director. In order to maintain the integrity of their operation, it was imperative that the British instilled the qualities of womanhood and subordination

from a very early age. Fittingly, African girlhood became centered around the grooming of girls into a Western womanhood they would never be welcomed into.

The only mechanism that could successfully accomplish the manufacturing of African girls into beings commensurate with—but not equal to—European women emerged in the form of gendered education. To understand gendered education, we must first take a look at what gender means. As defined by sociologists, gender is a socially constructed reality of the roles and behaviors considered appropriate for men and women. It is important to note that gender does not only refer to females; there are also traits and activities specifically assigned to males. The term gendered, then, refers to how systems are shaped to reflect "the experience, prejudices, or orientations of one sex more than the other," often involving "gender differences or stereotypical gender" ("Gendered" 1). Gendered education in Nigeria became the nexus at which Europeans could reinforce the relationships of race, class, and gender. Boys were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills that would leverage them to eventually lead businesses and governments. But girls, who should only expect to gain social mobility through marriage, spent the majority of their school day learning to sew, among other skills necessary for becoming an acceptable wife and mother. Through this gendered education, "the low expectations of girls were first institutionalized, then systematized" (Leach 341).

The hopeful circumstances leading up to Nigeria's independence and the disappointing outcomes thereafter left a bitter taste about autonomy in the mouths and minds of the nation's citizens. Nigeria's inability to cope with the chaos that ensued is typically blamed on poor leadership. Considering the history of gender disparities in education, and the present day global push for female perspectives in spheres of influence, I believe the focus of Nigeria's efforts

should be on its adolescent girl population. The returns on investing in girls has been proven to have positive economic, social, and political impact—reflected in multilateral organization's programing efforts such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). However, it is not simply the presence of women in power, but a revelation of the intrinsic value they possess and will offer, that is required. In this paper, I will illustrate why Nigeria's prosperity is contingent upon the re-education of girls into revolutionary understandings of their personal and social identities. I will propose an alternative solution to the current education system in the form of a non-governmental organization (NGO) that will foster the key qualities of effective leadership and direct the nation towards "unity and faith; peace and progress" ("About Nigeria" 1).

# CHAPTER ONE

## The Nigerian Woman: A Miracle of Versatility

### Positioning Myself within the Context My Research

Nigerian. Black-American. Neither, yet both. I was raised in a Nigerian household in the middle of white-suburbia, so to my extended family and friends, I was "too Americanized," and to my peers at school, I was "just black." This medley of identities caused some internal dissonance in my adolescence. (Never mind the sheer agony of having my name mispronounced everywhere I went.) I could not articulate this at the time, but growing up, I had to grapple with (and still do) the fact that blackness as a concept and political identity does not exist in Nigeria. It was something my parents and myself had to learn—that "being black" was a real thing, and that I could be hated for it. In the summer of 2013, my family and I spent a month traveling through Abuja, Enugu, and Anambra, visiting family and friends. When we returned to the States, we had a brief layover in New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport. While waiting in line for some food, I remember watching this hostile exchange between an elderly,

white couple and a black man. As I observed their body language, I wondered to myself whether their interactions were racially motivated or not. Then it dawned on me that I had not had to think about the fact that I was black in almost an entire month! I did not realize how conscious I am made to be of the fact that I am black in America. As a Nigerian-American girl who is easily identifiable as simply Black-American, I have to constantly situate myself between the overlap of these two cultures.

I remember as a kid not knowing where I fit in, if I could, or if I even wanted to. I realized that there were two competing narratives of my identity, and that in some senses I existed between two worlds. I had become very knowledgeable of western culture and values through formal schooling, but at home I was still an Igbo girl. Until I got to college, I never learned about my history outside of stories from my parents and grandparents, or my own personal research endeavors. I was also raised by an Igbo set of standards which shaped my attitudes towards womanhood, excellence, authority, and service, among other things. For example, although my mother constantly berated me for my disinterest in cooking or washing dishes (these were a Nigerian woman's duties to her home and how else would I learn to care for my one-day husband?), I was also told to never settle for less than my best in all that I do. Whether I was playing a sport, taking a math exam, or choosing my career path—the only stipulation was that I promised to excel. Respecting my elders was also of the upmost importance. For example, I never understood the concept of nursing homes, because in Nigerian culture one's parents and grandparents either retired back to Nigeria or lived with their children/grandchildren in their old age. It was like a return on the years they invested into one's life and wellbeing, and there was much to be learned from one's grandparents' wisdom and authority. I have also experienced the

connectedness and service-oriented Nigerian culture in the ways our American-based Nigerian community collectively celebrates graduations, marriages, and home-goings, or provides immense support during tragedies like illness and death.

Over the years, I have come to understand the strength in my multiculturalism, and this has motivated me to transcend cultural barriers. I found that my way of knowing, although different, was not wrong. Neither was the western way of knowing or the Nigerian perspective. In fact, western culture and traditional culture in Nigeria have become so deeply entangled, it is impossible to completely extract western influence from the country. As I reflected on my own knowledge and experiences, I began wondering how Nigerian girls on the continent and in the diaspora were grappling with this same question of identity. What is being done to help them come to the same conclusion I had—that the knowledge the Nigerian girl possesses is both powerful and transformative? This paper is my attempt to explore the implication of the adolescent Nigerian girls' educational experience on her personal success and the success of her nation.

**Nigeria: An Overview**

Nigeria did not exist as a country prior to 1914, but as a massive area of land in West Africa rich in cultural diversity. Almost all the native races of the African continent were represented in this area, from the Bantu who later intermingled with the Sudanese to the Fulanis who migrated from the Sahara Desert and settled in the far north. This region consisted of many prosperous empires. The Kanem-Borno (600 B.C. to 1900) and Hausa-Fulani (1000 to 1903) empires were bolstered by trade with the Nile region and Trans-Saharan routes; and the Yoruba developed complex, powerful city-states, some of which became the most powerful among West African

kingdoms. Other people groups such as the Igbo organized themselves in federations of village communities, with a society of elders sharing various governmental functions ("History" 1). By the mid 1800's, the British began to establish their presence around the area now known as Lagos. Following the Berlin Conference of 1885, Britain consolidated its hold over what became the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, governing the country by indirect rule through local leaders ("Nigeria Profile Timeline" 1).

Today, Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic made up of thirty-six states and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Nigeria has the largest population of any African country, nearing about 120 million. There are estimated to be over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo in the east, the Yoruba in the west, and the Hausa-Fulani in the north constitute about sixty percent of the nation's population. Other groups, such as the Edo, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Kanuri make up the remaining forty percent. The dynamics between Nigeria's rich, cultural history and British colonial strategies must be taken into account throughout this paper, as it will help us contextualize the effect of British colonization on women and girls' identity throughout all parts of Nigeria.

**Nigerian Women under British Colonialism**

Margaret Ekpo (1914-2006) was a fierce defender of women's rights whose greatest strength was that she never apologized for being a woman. She is remembered for her grace and courage, with which she stood her ground against the social, political, and economic injustices perpetrated by British colonial rule in Nigeria. Her determination to remain active in the shaping of Nigerian society inspired other women to become politically active and participate in protect-

ing their personal and collective interests. She often toured the southeastern region of Nigeria with the greatly-respected Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who was a teacher, political campaigner, women's rights activist and traditional aristocrat. Together, they met with various women's groups to awaken their political consciousness. Despite her limited education, Ekpo exhibited the resourcefulness and creativity necessary to influence the masses. When husbands refused to allow their wives to become members of the Aba Market Women's Association, Margaret Ekpo took advantage of the scarcity of salt (a household staple), by buying and taking control of it all. She demanded no woman could purchase the salt unless they were a member of the association; subsequently, the husbands complied. Ekpo and Ransome-Kuti embodied the grit, will, and resilience to persevere in the face of being threatened, harassed, and even jailed for the content of their speeches and the boldness of their demands. Finally, Margaret Ekpo was a bridge between generations. She learned from and collaborated with her forerunners, like Ransome-Kuti, and invested in the future of those behind her, by establishing a school for young girls.

Ekpo and Ransome-Kuti are not anomalies, but the consequences of a legacy of "ambitious, go-ahead, courageous, self-reliant, hardworking, independent women…[with]…startling energy, their power of organization and of leadership, their practical common sense and quick apprehension of reality" (Leith-Ross 337). The pre-colonial Nigerian woman was not subordinated or marginalized in her community; rather she was a "miracle of versatility" (Mazrui, *The Africans*) who participated as a mother, cultivator, market-woman, negotiator, and political figure. The diversity of her roles depicts female centrality—the heart of many Nigerian societies. Female centrality reinforces the idea that the fabric of Nigerian society was and is knitted together by women. In *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in North-*

*ern Igboland, 1900-1960,* Nwando Achebe introduces her concept of the female principle, which "embodies all aspects of female involvement in society,…revealed in the types of roles women assume" (Achebe 27).

In the early 1900s, the British made observations about the remarkable nature of the Nigerian woman. At a time when the scope of the British woman's contribution to European society was being rigidly defined, what the British saw in Nigeria startled them. They quickly found that "1) the people as a whole were proving impossible to rule; and 2) the women were rebellious and rioting all over the place" (Amadiume 13). Mrs. Leith-Ross, the wife of a colonial officer who was sent to conduct studies in the southern Igbo provinces, initially thought the Igbo woman to be a "nearly untutored savage" (44). With Great Britain as their frame of reference, it became an early mission of British colonialism to redefine the African woman by exporting European ideologies into an environment that was built to function efficiently without them. Thus, women's political, economic, and social activity in Southern Nigeria rapidly diminished over the first half of the twentieth century. They were excluded from administration, and subsequently lost traditional areas of responsibility and participation. While they were afforded more opportunities in trade, men—who were offered greater incentives—began to flood this sphere previously dominated by women. Through imported Christianity, women were also deprived of the status they once held in their traditional religion, only regaining some power through the indigenous churches. Inadequate education for girls resulted in low provision for schools, a gendered curriculum, and few opportunities for employment for women. In this section, we will discuss the effects of colonialism on women via the political, economic, and social systems introduced by the British.

British administrators in Nigeria reflected the late Victorian model of gender roles in their society, where there was a distinct separation between home life and public life. Women were meant to preserve the refuge of home life, while men protected women from the pressures of public life, for which they were supposedly unsuited. The British came from a society with no women at any level of government, and therefore brought these same expectations to Nigeria. The political system in Southern Nigeria was unlike anything the British had encountered. Economic involvement in Nsukka, for example, allowed women to take prestigious titles as well as bestow these traditional titles upon others. In *Male Daugthers, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society,* Ifi Amadiume echoes these sentiments by describing the dual-sex organizational principle behind the structure of Nigerian society:

> These principles and ideologies governed the economic activities of men and women. They also governed access to wealth, and prescribed achievement-based statuses and roles, such as titles and the accumulation of wives, which, in the indigenous society, brought power, prestige and more wealth" (27).

This dual-sex system extended into political organization as well. Each sex managed their own affairs, allowing for a collaborative and efficient division of power and labor. In the pre-colonial period, Nigerian women had forums where they could voice their concerns and rally the support of other women to take action. The colonial administration could not comprehend the idea of women's organizations or their autonomy to make decisions regarding women's affairs, and thus women were completely excluded from dealings between the British and village leaders. Even in Nigerian societies where there were some important women chiefs, they were "ren-

dered invisible to exclusively male colonial administrators" (Mba 38). Subsequently, women's titles began to lose power and community prestige.

The introduction of the colonial economy not only disrupted the dual-sex system, it also made it possible for the colonial administration to introduce taxation to Southern Nigeria. While women were gaining more economic opportunities, they were still negatively impacted by the shift in the sex division of economic roles. In Nsukka, female economic activity was formerly divided into four zones: farming, weaving, potting, and trading. In each of these divisions, women's profits far outweighed their initial capital investments because resources were either cheap or readily available. However, in women-dominated industries like weaving and potting, colonialism's new, and often times cheaper, imports replaced the need for local crafts. Colonialism also caused a gendered occupational shift, as men were more likely to benefit from specialized training programs. Women were excluded from the teaching of new techniques and technologies, and as a consequence, their labor was devalued (Achebe 109-153). Additionally, men were offered greater incentives for going into trade, which was a sphere traditionally dominated by women. As a result, men began to flood large-scale distributive and retail trade, and the production of cash crops, replacing women who were once considered the chief cultivators.

Taxation—a people's contribution to the functioning of their society—had already existed in the form of people performing certain services and contributing goods to support their villages. British taxation, however, which "took the form of fixed, compulsory, regular payments of cash…, required the objectionable counting of persons, and the benefits of which could not be immediately appreciated, was resented by both men and women" (Mba 45). Women, especially, viewed British taxation as interfering with their personal privacy, and the domestic sphere they

traditionally protected. Men's efforts to protest were quickly thwarted, but women continued to protest peacefully and violently despite harsh repression.

These rigid western gender ideologies had implications on women and girls' social mobility as well. The colonial government's participation in education was motivated by a need for employing educated personnel to run the country; thus, the neglect of girls' education was due in part to the government's opposition to the idea of employing women in the civil service. The Christian church also played a role in establishing schools in Nigeria. Through their lens, education served to train clergymen and teachers for the church. Since women were never clergy and became teachers only much later, the education of girls was regarded by the church as less important.

As educational opportunities in Europe were expanding for women and girls, the British quickly identified the girl-child's education in Africa as a point of entry through which they could pervade and consequently reinforce gender ideologies. In *African Girls, Nineteenth-Century Mission Education and the Patriarchal Imperative* Fiona Leach analyzes how through the British gendered education, "the low expectations of girls were first institutionalized, then systematized" (341). Education in Nigeria was modeled after the English public school system, wherein there were far fewer schools for girls than for boys, and the curriculum for girls consisted of activities to prepare girls to become wives and mothers. While boys were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills that would leverage them to eventually lead businesses and governments; girls—who should only expect to gain social mobility through marriage—spent the majority of their school day instructed in character training, domestic science, and married life.

The provisions made for girls' education in Southern Nigeria were also grossly inferior to those made for boys. As a result, boys outnumbered girls in primary school attendance. In 1930, 37,000 boys and 10,000 girls attended the approved mission schools. By 1947, although the number of girls attending schools had risen to 38,000, boys still outnumbered them at 114,000. Gradually, missionary secondary schools for girls spread throughout Southern Nigeria, but the proportion of girls to boys was still extremely low. In 1920, the ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools was 1:35. In 1930, there were fifteen mission secondary schools, with a total of 559 boys and 12 girls. By 1947, though there were now 36 secondary schools, boys still outnumbered girls —7,758 to 595. (Mba 61-62). The effects of this disproportionate access to education began to trickle down to the familial level. Sending boys to school became equated with national and personal liberation, and aligned with the country's economic shift from its traditional agrarian ethos to the colonial economic structure. Families found it more beneficial to have male children. As a result, boys became favored while the girl child was disappointing and disregarded. These statistics translate into the lack of opportunities and access to education for the Nigerian girl child. While the most recent figures by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative do not provide up-to-date information about primary and secondary school enrollment rates, data shows that the recent female literacy rate (66%) still lags behind the male literacy rate (78%) indicating that female access to education is still a problem (Nigeria 1).

By the late 1920's, Nigerian women were becoming more restless and began to resist the imposition of the colonial structure on their society. Around the same time of the 1929 Aba Women's Riots, Queen's College was established as a result of efforts by Lagos women's organizations like the Lagos Women's League, the Ladies' Progressive Club, and the Rosebud Club

who consistently pressured the government to establish a secondary school for girls along the lines of King's College for boys (established in 1909). Most of the women involved were the wives and daughters of elite and educated men, who were also concerned with the establishment of educational facilities. Among the activist women were Miss Oyinkan Ajasa (daughter of Sir Kitoyi Ajasa), Mrs. Olajumoke Obasa (wife of Dr. Obasa), and Miss Oluwole (daughter of Bishop Oluwole). They wanted to prove to the government that there was indeed a demand for and interest in female education, and in fact, had already demonstrated their interest in the education of girls by founding their own schools. In 1908, Mrs. Obasa established a dressmaking school. In the early 1920s, Miss Oluwole founded a school specialized in domestic economy and Miss Ajasa founded a school patterned after Cheltenham Ladies' College in England, which she had attended.

A study of Nigeria's colonial history illustrates the journey Nigerian women have taken to arrive at their present-day positions. African women emerged from the post-colonial era stripped of their former power and today, do not enjoy the same freedom to exercise their versatility of roles, as is evidenced by the gap in women in leadership and their general restriction to the domestic sphere. Still in the midst of adversity, these resilient women carved out places for themselves in a society that was trying to exclude them. When we examine the 21st century African girl, then, we must understand that she is the product of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother's experiences in pre- and post- colonial times. The trajectory of the girl-child in Nigeria is contingent upon the re-education of girls into revolutionary understandings of their personal and social identities.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Gender Gap in Nigerian Leadership

Although Europeans no longer have a direct presence on the continent, the effects of their activities in Africa during the colonial era are still felt today because their systems and ideologies are sustained by Africans. Paulo Freire argues that,

> …the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity (Freire 26).

By maintaining leadership positions, systems, and ideas that were imposed by European colonizers, African leaders assist in hindering the continent's advancement. For example, the British initially thought the Nigerian woman was a "nearly untutored savage" (Leith-Ross 44). With European standards of femininity as their frame of reference, British colonialists in Nigeria sought to redefine the Nigerian woman by exporting European ideologies into a society that was functioning efficiently with Nigerian constructs for women's roles. Their method was British

gendered education through which, “the low expectations of girls were first institutionalized, then systematized” (Leach 341). While African boys were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills that would leverage them to eventually lead businesses and governments; African girls—who could only expect to gain social mobility through marriage—spent the majority of their school day instructed in character training, domestic science, and married life. As a result, women’s traditional political, economic, and social participation in Nigeria rapidly diminished over the first half of the twentieth century. Some Nigerian communities were reluctant to accept these British ideas that threatened to alter their way of life, and so they never completely absorbed these ideas into every part of their culture. Still, there are many Africans today who willingly participate in these westernized systems and have successfully maintained European ideals of restricting women’s involvement in the public sphere.

Between the British conquest of Northern Nigeria in the early twentieth century and Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the British ruled this predominantly Muslim region of the country through a system of indirect rule. Despite their intentional imposition of Christianity in other parts of Nigeria, the British assumed a facade of religious impartiality in the north. They believed Islam was inferior to Christianity, but they also believed that this inferiority was suitable for the inferiority of Africans themselves, and was at least superior to the other indigenous religions being practiced in the country. Rather than replacing traditional leaders as the British had done in other parts of Nigeria, they maintained existing forms of administration. This allowed them to seamlessly extract resources and capital from the region. The British approach to colonizing Northern Nigeria caused division in Muslim society by creating elitist groups. The British supported Muslim leaders who they determined to be most aligned with their Christian bias, while

neglecting Muslim groups and leaders they determined to be ‘bad’ (Reynolds 601). Today, Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist group operating in Northern Nigeria, embodies this concept of Africans perpetuating oppressive European ideas. Boko Haram, whose name meaning alludes to the deceitful and forbidden nature of western society, was founded in 2002, but has only gained global media attention in recent years. Mohammed Yusuf, an Islamic sect leader who was killed in 2009 by Nigerian security forces, is credited for founding the organization. Contrary to the beliefs of his own organization, Yusuf was extremely wealthy and highly educated. He received a graduate-level education, was very proficient in English, and lived a lavish life (BBC 1). Since its inception, Boko Haram has been terrorizing the northern region of Nigeria, kidnapping hundreds, killing thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes. A 19-year-old secondary school girl who had previously escaped kidnapping by Boko Haram in January 2014 told Human Rights Watch that when armed insurgents stopped the vehicle she and five other female students were traveling home in, one of the insurgents shouted, “Aha! These are the people we are looking for. So you are the ones with strong heads who insist on attending school when we have said ‘boko’ is ‘haram.’ We will kill you here today” (Human Rights Watch 1). In April 2014, Boko Haram gained even more global attention for kidnapping 276 schoolgirls from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok (Human Rights Watch 1). As previously discussed, European notions that Africa was the heart of darkness with no history, allowed the colonialists to question Africans’ ability to think about advancing themselves and their society. Despite their opposition to Western education, Boko Haram ironically maintains these European beliefs that Africans should not be thinking beings. The existence of this terrorist group is one of the products of a post-colonial state built on the colonial past.By specifically targeting some of

Nigeria's brightest schoolgirls, they have accepted European ideas that these African girls were doing what they were not supposed to be doing: thinking. While the media is quick to focus on this open violence by groups like Boko Haram, they are not as quick to recognize how imposing and maintaining western ideas constitutes violence against Nigerian cultures. Although this violence is more covert, many contemporary Nigerians men and women also perpetuate British standards of femininity when they are reluctant to embrace the idea that women are qualified and entitled to serve in leadership positions.

**Barriers to Female Leadership in Nigeria**

Nigerian men's and women's attitudes towards female leadership in contemporary Nigeria are generally negative and reflective of British standards of leadership during the colonial era. There are a number of societal and personal pressures women face regarding their ability and desire to pursue leadership roles. In 2007, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) facilitated a discussion on "Women in Leadership Roles." This discussion drew from the experiences of women in various countries in order to analyze the challenges they endured in obtaining leadership positions in several sectors. These women identified a wide range of barriers to women's leadership at the societal, institutional, and individual levels. These same obstacles, left unaddressed, will serve as hinderances to the adolescent Nigerian girls who aspire to become leaders in their spheres of influence.

Participants identified the current male paradigm of leadership as a barrier to women's representation in leadership, and are calling for a shift towards a paradigm that embraces women

and girls as equally capable partners. This means that a girl is no longer hindered from fully exercising her abilities, but is now allowed to play her part in advancing her society. Additionally, "…where oppressive cultures and legislations have stunted women's leadership abilities and confidence, they should be trained to increase their capacity to assume and exercise leadership roles" (United Nations 23).

A lack of leadership training and mentoring was another factor highlighted by participants in Nigeria. Girls do not have the same access as their male counterparts to specific management training, skills training, professional development, decision-making skills, and mentorship programs. Nigerian girls are not exposed to this form of education which would equip them with the information, skills, and tools for success.

Finally, Rose Uchem, the Executive Director of Ifendu for Women's Development in Nigeria (IFENDU) also believes that a lack of self-confidence holds girls back. Public leadership begins with leadership of the self and an ability to engage in self-actualization. However, girls become an obstacle to themselves by internalizing oppression, which impacts their psyche and conditions them to act against themselves (United Nations 22-23). Because they have internalized western ideals for what a leader should look like, Nigerian girls do not actively seek to take up space as leaders in the public sphere. Although they may desire to be leaders, what they perceive as the consequences to being a leader outweigh their desire to challenge the current standard of leadership. In their experience, leaders are typically men. And when leaders are women, these women are publicly ridiculed, are considered undesirable for marriage, or must sacrifice devotion to their personal and family lives. As a result, Nigerian girls disqualify themselves before a leadership opportunity even arises by settling for less than they are capable of.

**The Gender Gap in Leadership: Supporting Data**

Today, there is an absence of the pre-colonial equivalents to female politicians, business owners, and religious leaders who participated in the villages and societies that eventually became Nigeria. Although women leaders in contemporary Nigeria are gaining ground in the private sector, they remain severely outnumbered by their male counterparts and are hardly granted the same public visibility. In its 2014 Global Gender Gap Report, the World Economic Forum quantified the magnitude of gender-based disparities in several nations. Of the 142 countries assessed, Nigeria ranked 118, with a gender gap ratio of 0.6391 (the number 0 represents perfect inequality and the number 1 represents perfect equality). The World Economic Forum determined a country's ranking based on how women performed in four categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. In these four areas, women are faring worse than their male counterparts, but the most staggering is women's involvement in politics. Although women have made some progress, the gender imbalance in their political representation has improved the least among the four areas. As of 2014, there are seven women to every ninety-three men in parliament, twenty-five women to seventy-five men in ministerial positions, and 0 women to 50 men as heads of state in the last fifty years. Despite concerted efforts by the Nigerian government, various non-profit organizations, and international entities such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, Nigeria is also not performing well in female education. This year, Nigeria is among the ten lowest ranking countries with regards to female enrollment in primary and secondary education. Compared to other countries with similar income groups, Nigeria performs below average in women's political represen-

tation and education attainment. This poses a serious problem for the Nigerian girl, whose ability to thrive in her society is contingent upon the quality of her education.

Today's girls become tomorrow's women. The differential treatment of girls and boys inevitably translates to the preferential treatment of men and women in Nigerian society. Nigerians who engage in leadership positions, systems, and ideas that were imposed by European colonizers, have sustained the exclusion of girls from assuming leadership roles and are hindering the country's development. As a result, there is a devastating gender gap in leadership roles that adolescent girls must be prepared and equipped to fill. Considering the role education has played in creating and exacerbating the gender gap in leadership, it makes sense that it would also lie at the core of the solution to this problem. In Nigeria, where the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism have created a void in effective leadership, the trajectory of the nation's prosperity is contingent upon the re-education of adolescent girls into revolutionary understandings of their personal and social identities.

# CHAPTER THREE

## The Smart Nigerian Girl

### Between Two Worlds: Western Education and African Indigenous Knowledge

According to The Columbia Encyclopedia, education is:

> …any process, either formal or informal, that shapes the potential of a maturing organism. Informal education results from the constant effect of environment, and its strength in shaping values and habits can not be overestimated. Formal education is a conscious effort by human society to impart the skills and modes of thought considered essential for social functioning (“Education” 1).

Education is crucial to a society’s development because it is one of the tools by which any individual is able to improve their own life. The above definition mostly addresses the processes of formal western education, which was introduced to Africa and Africans during the colonial period. Although this way of viewing education has been embraced by Africans and continues to add to advancement processes on the continent, it poses a challenge for a full under-

standing of the Smart Nigerian Girl because she is simultaneously being shaped by two cultures: the western culture she is formally taught in school and the Nigerian culture she is informally taught at home.

Before the colonial period, different African societies had their own forms of education. Some of these were formal (through ritualistic practices and rites of passage) and informal (through cultural norms and expectations). For example, the Nsulu people of Igboland from Isiala Ngwa Local Government Area in Abia State practiced formal ceremonies like the Obada Festival. This ceremony prepared adolescent girls between the ages of sixteen and eighteen for womanhood and traditional marriage by showcasing them to their community. Male and female societal roles were perpetuated informally by the presence of mothers, fathers, traders, and religious leaders who set the precedent for male and female responsibilities to the community. Educational values are also often informally spread through use of language. The Igbo are particularly well known for their proverbs which spread wisdom by explaining complex concepts in a few simple words.

African traditional systems of education were designed to maintain indigenous knowledge, which is "the information that people in a given community, based on experience and adaptation to a local culture and environment have developed over time, and continue to develop" (Murove and Mukuka 216). Yoruba traditional education was a major avenue for disseminating African indigenous knowledge. Among the Yoruba, education was built on the concept of making an individual "Omolúàbí," (Awoniyi 384) or 'an ideal being.' The ideal being embodied good character, which to the Yoruba include respect for elders, loyalty to family and traditions, honesty, devotion to duty, service, sympathy, and courage—among many other qualities. The

goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to "foster good character in the individual and to make the child a useful member of the community" (Akínyemí 162-163). Similarly, one study shows that from a list of sixty-two traits, Igbo educators in the formal western system consider the following top ten to be valuable and characteristic of the ideal student: industrious, sincere, obedient, considerate of others, self-confident, healthy, courteous, desires to excel, affectionate, and adventurous (Ohuche 192). Based on this information, Nigerian education was founded upon the culture of its people and was tailored to the student's cultural environment. This cultural environment consisted of many ideas about gender, including the vital role of women in upholding society. For example, the concept of female centrality is fundamental to African traditional thought processes in many Nigerian societies. Female centrality reinforces the idea that the fabric of Nigerian society was and is knitted together by women. Even the earth in Igbo language is regarded as female, because it is the source of life and growth. Female centrality embodies all aspects of female involvement in society and was manifested in the versatility of women's roles (Achebe 27). Today, such knowledge is still taught informally to the Nigerian girl. For example, girls learn from their mothers how to cook, manage the home, and strategies for buying, selling, and negotiating in the market. Through this exchange of knowledge, African indigenous knowledge is still used to sustain African communities and African culture in order to maintain the resources and behaviors necessary for their continued survival. African indigenous knowledge is dynamic. It encompasses traditional technology, art, and medicine; belief systems and values; and the sociocultural environments that play an essential role in the African's day-to-day livelihood. For the smart and western-educated Nigerian girl, this means that along with her

schooling which prepares her for certain occupational roles, she also has a responsibility to learn the traditional values that will sustain and advance her society.

**The Smart Nigerian Girl**

"Oh, so you're not *really* African are you?" As a child, I grew tired of always trying to explain to my classmates that although I had been born and raised in the United States, I was still very much a Nigerian girl—to which they responded, "but you don't *look* Nigerian." I wondered to myself: what does a Nigerian girl look like? I was outraged that to them, I couldn't be Nigerian because I was well-dressed, well-fed, and well-spoken. I always joked with my family and African friends that perhaps I would look more Nigerian if I had a bloated belly and an entourage of flies following me wherever I went! It was surprising for me that to my classmates, the Nigerian girl is illiterate, unambitious, and oppressed, with no self-autonomy. I did not feel oppressed and I certainly had ambition: I was a Smart Nigerian Girl! But who could blame them when the only media messaging concerning Nigerian girls is about their being kidnapped by terrorists, married off at a young age, or domestically abused?

It is not my aim to diminish these unfortunate realities for many girls across the African continent, but to show that what has been done to her does not largely define who the Nigerian girl is. The Smart Nigerian Girl, as I have come to define her, is ambitious, courageous, self-reliant, bold, and hardworking. She is resourceful, creative, and versatile, but she is not preoccupied with balancing everyone's expectations of her. On one hand, she has been taught by western education that her culture is archaic and that there is little to be learned from her history or her

elders. But on the other hand, she knows from her Nigerian upbringing that she is valuable, that the knowledge she carries is powerful, and that she is essential for her community's advancement. Although she is tasked with navigating the boundaries between these two competing facets of her identity, the Nigerian girl ultimately asserts herself. Her success has always been necessary for her society's survival because despite her physical location or western-education level, she possesses the knowledge and character that has always upheld her family and community. With one foot in Nigeria and another in the western world, she has carved out a place for herself in a society that pigeonholes her into a set standard. In doing so, she bridges the gap between the influences of her western and African education so she can lead her community forward as an effective mother, market-woman, politician, artist, and whatever else she dreams to be.

One of the first Smart Nigerian Girls I met as a student at The Ohio State University was Adaeze Okoli. We crossed paths at the Welcome Back Barbecue event at the beginning of my sophomore year; she was a freshman and was trying to find her way back to her dorm when I offered to walk with her to Morrill Tower. Within minutes of our first conversation, I recognized her as embodying the ambition I knew to be characteristic of my Nigerian female relatives and friends. We talked about all she planned to accomplish during her time at Ohio State University, and I immediately noticed she was well-informed, articulate, and assertive. As an aspiring pre-med student on a full scholarship, she planned to get involved in the university's Undergraduate Student Government and African Youth League. Over the years, Adaeze has proven to have the initiative to match her dreams. She just finished her term as president of the African Youth League, and has also served as a director and senator in the student government's diversity and

inclusion committee. As a leader who must deal with disagreements and conflict within her team and group members, she is able to identify what is just, what is right, and what decision will benefit the group as a whole. Adaeze knows enough about herself to set practical and positive goals towards achieving her vision for her life. For example, she is always actively pursuing research and internship opportunities that will prepare her for her next stage of life in graduate school.

Nigerian girls are also empowered by their own will and vision for their life. My older sister, Ugonna, has always felt safe and comfortable expressing what she thinks, saying how she feels, and asking for what she needs. She is confident in saying yes when she means yes, and no when she means no—knowing that she has the right to choice, privacy, and respect, and is authorized to make decisions independent of everyone else's expectations. For example, while studying at Ohio University, Ugonna took it upon herself to revive Sauti: a defunct student-run television station that was meant to give a voice to ethnic students on campus. Despite naysayers and an occasionally uncooperative team, she taught herself to produce, direct, edit, and report the news and brought the show back to life. Nigerian Girls acknowledge their inner strength and capabilities. They appreciates themselves, admire themselves, and are sure of themselves, which in turn enables them to appreciate and admire others. Empowerment also involves courage, strength, conviction, and being able to take risks to act upon what that conviction requires. When Ugonna chose to study Journalism in college, so many people tried to discourage her from a career in a nontraditional field that did not guarantee a stable income. But she respectfully rejected their recommendations because she knew she had the passion, drive, and talent to succeed in the field. She now works at NBC's Today Show in New York City.

Nigerian girls are bold and fearless. When they have an idea, they are willing to push past the obstacles until it comes into fruition. I have known friends who have embraced the uncertainty of moving across the country or even across the world, if it meant they are at least one step closer to their dreams. Yagazie Emezi moved to Arizona from her home in Aba, Nigeria in 2005, but relocated back to Lagos, Nigeria after finishing high school and receiving her dual degree in Cultural Anthropology and Africana Studies. While in the United States, she started a personal blog with the goal of curating existing African culture and talent beyond past and traditional practices. In 2014, her blog evolved into a successful, self-named brand. YAGAZIE, dedicated to the cultural preservation of the African aesthetic, provides a platform for young African photographers to showcase their work, inspire one another, tell their stories, and share their point of view of Africa through their own lenses. The goal is to provide a space where Africans can share Africa's narrative which has historically been controlled by non-Africans. Her website showcases contributing photographers based in Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, the United States, and Germany, and also features interviews spotlighting African creatives, artists, fashion designers, and filmmakers. Emezi not only exemplifies the creativity and resourcefulness of Nigerian girls, she also demonstrates her commitment to using her knowledge to build a community.

The Smart Nigerian Girl is both literate and educated. Educated girls excel academically and assume their society's mold for female expectations, but smart girls, in addition to academic excellence, also challenge the status quo. In order to do so, Nigerian girls use their knowledge of their history and the women before them to spur them forward as forerunners for their generation and the generations of girls to come. For example, Margaret Ekpo's and Funmilayo Ransome-

Kuti's went against the grain in their relentless pursuit of women's rights, which also demonstrated their awareness of the rights and liberties their mothers and grandmothers enjoyed. As representatives of women leaders in politics, their determination to remain active in shaping Nigerian society inspired other women to become politically active in spite of colonial resistance to their efforts. Ekpo and Ransome-Kuti also embodied the grit, will, and resilience to persevere in the face of opposition against the content of their speeches and the boldness of their demands. The strides made by both of these women paved the way for contemporary leaders such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala: Nigeria's first female Minister of Finance and a former managing director of the World Bank. With degrees from Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Okonjo-Iweala has risen to the top of her field as a champion of economic change. Her self-reliant and innovative spirit are apparent in her many accomplishments despite the male-dominated nature of economics. Since 2011, when she received her second appointment as Finance Minister of Nigeria, the country's GDP saw a robust growth of 6.87% between 2012 and 2013. She is also recognized for developing reform programs that helped stabilize Nigeria's economy and improve governmental transparency (Howard et. al 1). Following in her footsteps is the generation of human rights activist Hafsat Abiola and world-renowned novelist Chimamanda Adichie. Hafsat Abiola is the daughter of MKO Abiola, whose 1993 democratic presidential election was violently overthrown by a military coupe.  He was jailed for treason and later died in prison. Her mother, Kudirat—who led a wave of demonstrations for his freedom—was seen as a threat and assassinated in 1996. Abiola, who was still studying at Harvard at the time of her mother's death, was determined that her parents' sacrifice not be in vain. She is now one of Nigeria's most prominent civil rights activists. In 1996, she founded Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), a group that

works to strengthen Nigerian civil society and promote female leadership by offering training to women and girls who want to run for public office. She was also appointed to serve as a special adviser to the governor of Ogun State (Kermeliotis 1). Chimamanda Adichie's creativity and ambition certainly inspires the millions of young women and adolescent girls aspiring towards success in nontraditional fields by her example as a leader in the literary world. Her personal stories of adjusting to western culture resonate with many Nigerian girls who are faced with the same inner dialogue between western education and their Nigerian upbringing.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Hafsat Abiola, and Chimamanda Adichie have clearly played a major role in shaping their societies. Investing in the Nigerian girls' immense potential will ensure that the successes of these women will not remain an anomaly, but become the standard. Through education, Nigerian girls can receive the practical and cultural skills necessary for their personal and community's prosperity.

**Smart Girls vs. Educated Girls**

According to development organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank, educated girls are vital for several reasons. First, they change demography. According to a New York Times article, "one of the factors that correlates most strongly to instability is youth bulge in a population" (Kristof 1). Educated women and girls have significantly smaller families, which helps manage a nation's population. Because they are enrolled in school, girls will get married later, which delays when they have children and how many children they are able to have. The children of an educated mother are also more likely to survive birth because her body is capable of handling the stress of childbirth. She also ensures that her children are able to ob-

tain an education as well. Secondly, educated girls double the labor force. They boost the economy, raise the standards of living, and ultimately spur a cycle of development. A 2011 World Bank report found that investing in girls' education and opportunities in Nigeria could increase a country's gross domestic product by 1.2% in a single year (Chaaban and Cunningham 1), and girls who attend school could increase their lifetime earnings by up to fifteen percent.

While these issues will certainly be alleviated with the promotion of western education for girls, the issue in Nigeria and in most parts of the world is not just about educating girls, but also empowering them to be leaders in all sectors of society. Simply providing formal western education with no application to one's culture results in educated girls who are not equipped to thrive in their society. The importance of preparing a child to thrive in their community was once prominent in African education, but European schooling has since phased out this practice. During Europe's colonization of Africa, Europeans assumed that Africans had no pre-existing ways of educating themselves, and that Africans had nothing to contribute to the maintenance and transformation of African values and societies. The notion that Africa was the heart of darkness with no history allowed the colonialists to not only question Africans' existence, but also their humanity. Europeans also presented themselves as those possessing the only valuable skills and thought processes to impose upon Africa and Africans. Paulo Freire refers to this oppressive approach to education as the "banking" concept of education, through which authority figures deposit information into their students:

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates

> education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence (Freire 53).

However, if education is "*any* process that shapes the potential of a maturing organism," ("Education" 1) then an educated individual in a given environment should be recognized as a mature organism with the skill set and knowledge essential for social functioning in their community. Taking this definition into account shows that before colonialism, Africans had developed their own formal and informal processes to ensure they were producing men and women capable of maintaining and advancing their societies. In fact, in Igbo society, children who attended the missionary or colonial schools were generally regarded as

> …uninformed on the affairs of their communities because they lost a great deal which could have been acquired through more intimate association with their parents and other elders. Igbo elders always distinguished between "natural" (or "real") and "bookish" intelligence, implying that however brilliant a boy was at school he was in another sense quite ignorant (Ubah 377).

Although this quote does not reference girls, whose access to schooling came comparatively later than boys', girls also become alienated from traditional, skillful knowledge about cooking certain foods, performing traditional dances, building huts, making cloth, and farming (Abidogun 34) when they attend school. As a result many of them feel disconnected from their families and communities.

Muslim groups in Northern Nigeria share similar sentiments. The Islamic educational system, which predates British colonialism in Nigeria, has been largely responsible for maintain-

ing order and unity. Students enter Koranic schools between the ages of four and six, and are taught both the basic principles of their religion and the values of their culture. Similar to traditional Yoruba education, some of the values most highly esteemed in a Muslim society are respect for authority, honesty, and truthfulness. Many parents do not believe these virtues are emphasized to the same extent in western schools, and thus find these schools to be disruptive to the entire Muslim lifestyle. Youth who engage in rebellious behaviors such as smoking, being disobedient, or neglecting household chores are seen as corrupted, and many parents attribute their behavior to western schooling. Western education weakens the socialization processes through which Muslim children internalize the norms, culture, and beliefs of their society (Clarke 137).

It is also argued by Muslim groups in Northern Nigeria that western education imparts knowledge without providing the necessary training to handle it. Western education fails to engage the local arts, crafts, and rural ways of life of Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. Western education is thus regarded as irrelevant to Muslim Nigerians, because it provides young people with academic information they cannot apply. Traditionally, Muslim Nigerian youth undergo apprenticeships in order to be completely immersed in their teacher's ideology, learn the theory and practice of Islam, and acquire the skills necessary to be successful in their field. For Muslim Nigerian groups, "the acquisition of knowledge is not separate from the acquisition of skills and techniques and a 'philosophy' necessary for living" (Clarke 138).

In the case of contemporary Nigeria, western education will continue to prepare generations of Nigerians to maintain the West's economic and political interests, while compromising Nigerian culture and indigenous knowledge. The educated Nigerian girl is then able to contribute

to these westernized aspects of her society, but is ill-equipped to contribute to sustaining her culture because of the discord between the competing European and African narratives of her identity. That is why the Nigerian girl on the continent and in the diaspora, who is educated in the western sense, risks losing herself and her culture if education is restricted to schooling. The Smart Nigerian girl, however, uses what she has learned through western education as an accessory to her way of navigating through the world as a Nigerian girl. She knows how the western system works, but is motivated by a different set of ideals. For example, I have found that many of my peers were content with settling for a high school diploma, or at most an undergraduate degree. However, my knowledge of and access to the western education system, coupled with my own ambitions and the reputable Igbo desire to excel, pushes me to reach the top.

The current system of schooling in Africa does not create an environment that encourages Nigerian girls to thrive. Africans who participate in the western education system as is, engage in curricula that reinforces ideas that will train African students to function in westernized societies while neglecting the traditional education needed to help them function in their own societies. Akínyemí, for example, discusses the effects of relying on the school system to properly educate a people:

> Today, the myth that the school system is the sole custodian of the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual development of the Yoruba children under its care has been broken…Theoretical knowledge without any foundation in the culture of the people is useless. In other words, we would be acquiring theoretical knowledge in vain if we ignored the conditions of our own existence and the real world

> we are living in. By implication, we cannot properly educate the child outside her/his cultural environment. That the Yoruba traditional society has something to offer education theory and practice is brought out lucidly in its traditional education pattern… (Akínyemí 162).

The consensus reached by many of the non-profit organizations currently operating in contemporary Nigeria is that formal schooling is not doing enough to prepare Nigerian adolescent girls to excel in their environment. Youth development organizations such as the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND) and the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) seek to provide high quality informal educational environments for adolescent girls. These organizations are committed to challenging gender norms, helping young girls reach their full potential, and propelling them towards their futures. Kudra (for young women in the university) and Junior Kudra (for adolescent girls in secondary school) are KIND's major avenues through which they equip young women and girls with the information and skills necessary for participation as service leaders at all levels of society (KIND 1). Girls' Power Initiative focuses on female empowerment through a different approach. They combat the barriers that keep many girls from attending school by providing information to girls about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and tackling the issue of violence against women (GPI-Nigeria 1). What is needed in adolescent girls' education are more programs such as these that re-emphasize the formal and informal education processes that maintain the Nigerian girl's identity while still preparing her to meet the demands of the world ahead. As the backbone of African society and the traditional transmitters of cultural values and knowledge, the Smart Nigerian Girl is needed for her collective society's survival. She possesses the knowledge and character that has always upheld her family and community. In the next chapter, I

will discuss recommendations and strategies for creating a Nigeria where girls are embraced as full participants in the social, economic, and political sectors of society.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Moving Forward

> "…We cannot claim to be developing if we do not recognize the sacrifices women and girls have had to make in this great journey…The fortunes of women and girls have continued to improve as a result of access to education. Women and girls represent the heartbeat of any nation. Our women and girls hold the key to the untapped potentials of this great country" — President Goodluck Jonathan (The Women and Girls Summit 2)

Nigeria's women, who have sacrificed the most yet gained the least throughout Nigeria's history, offer the strongest possibility for change. The crucial role of women and girls in sustainable development has already been acknowledged verbally. Now, it is time for Nigeria to openly and actively acknowledge women and girls' power by investing in their potential through education. Over the years, several women have emerged as examples to girls of Nigerian women in leadership. However, without the proper mechanisms in place, the successes of women like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Hafsat Abiola, and Chimamanda Adichie will remain an anomaly rather

than the standard. The trajectory of Nigeria's prosperity is contingent upon educating girls into revolutionary understandings of their personal and social identities, in order to prepare them to meet the demands of the world ahead.

As noted by Dr. Mairo Mandara, Nigeria's country representative for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, girls are excluded from most educational efforts to bring about social change. Most children's programs focus on children under five, while youth programs tend to focus on males, and women's programs rarely capture the essence of the adolescent girl (The Women and Girls Summit 3-4). In order to create measurable and sustainable change in Nigeria, programs must be designed specifically to address the adolescent girl and her needs.

Many governmental and non-governmental entities, both within and outside of Nigeria, are beginning to catch on to developmental discourse that focuses on empowering the African girl-child. This is evident in the emergence of local and global programs and initiatives focusing on the well-being of the adolescent girl. The Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND) is a non-profit organization in Lagos, Nigeria that was founded in honor of Kudirat Abiola, a social activist and leader who was killed during her fight for her country's restoration of democracy. After Nigeria's independece, KIND shifted its focus from furthering democratic processes to empowering women and girls to be leaders. KIND's strategy focuses on providing leadership development to young women and creating collaborative projects aimed at removing their barriers to public participation. KIND's vision is for "an Africa where women are full participants in the continent's social, economic, and political development" (KIND 1).

Because the organization's creation was brought about by unfortunate circumstances surrounding the assassination of a strong female political leader, KIND intentionally operates with

an understanding of the Nigerian woman's traditional identity and seeks to restore her to that. Through their KUDRA and JUNIOR KUDRA leadership programs, KIND has successfully impacted over 4,000 young women in five of Nigeria's six geo-political zones. This proves that the organization's impact is far-reaching, and serves as a means to unite the country. These programs equip girls (from secondary school to the university-level) with the information, tools, and life skills they need to become successful leaders at all levels in society. Girls are required to participate in a five-day workshop and commit to one-year participation in registered KUDRA clubs. These KUDRA clubs will encourage the emergence of a new generation of women leaders in Nigeria by providing a platform for girls to engage with their communities through entrepreneurship, mentorship, and advocacy. KUDRA alumnae have access to internships with private firms, entrepreneurship skills training programs, and the opportunity to serve as mentors to girls who are currently in the KUDRA program.

In recent years, Nigerian-based organizations such as KIND, the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), and Girl Child Concerns (GCC) have worked alongside ActionAid, the United Nations Girls' Education and Initiative, and The Global Fund for Children to expand impact and reach. These ongoing, cross-cultural partnerships reaffirm that the solution to Nigeria's problems lie not only in Western thinking, but also in the indigenous ideas and knowledge that have always kept this nation going.

Most recently, in October 2014, the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy partnered with the National Center for Women Development and Friends Africa to host the first annual Women and Girls Summit. The summit was held in commemoration of the International Day of the Girl-Child, and brought together leaders from internationally and locally based government institu-

tions and non-profit organizations. The summit was designed to create a platform for dialogue among women of all ages (ranging from high school students to business women and government leaders) about the current issues affecting women and girls in Nigeria and Africa, the progress that has been made, and the work that must be done. Among the speakers was First Lady of Nigeria, Patience Jonathan who agreed in her opening address that "with the support of well-meaning Nigerians, women will be able to care for themselves, and also contribute to the development of their families, communities, and the nation" (The Women and Girls Summit 2). During the summit's keynote address, Chimdi Neliakuchukwu, a sixteen year old female student, spoke on behalf of Nigerian girls everywhere in stating that girls desire "…a qualitative education that puts us on the platform of competitive advantage with the rest of the world, while at the same time doing all that can be done to ensure we continue to uphold the values that we as a society have known from the old days" (The Women and Girls Summit 3).

Research by several United Nations agencies affirms that educating girls should be an important matter of national interest. Educated girls develop essential life skills including self-confidence and the ability to participate effectively in society. Educated girls help reduce infant and maternal mortality rates, contribute to national wealth, and improving the nation's overall health status ("Girls' Education: Nigeria Country Programme" 1). In July 2012, the United Nations' Girls Education Initiative released a formative evaluation of their work in Nigeria since 2005. The initiative has made significant progress in these three areas: creating policies promoting girls' education and gender equality, identifying and strengthening best practices in facilitating girls' education and gender equality, and facilitating effective international, national, and state-level partnerships for girls' education and gender equality ("Nigeria" 12) Their findings

showed that "as a result of policy changes favoring girls' education, there has been an increase in the enrollment and completion rates for girls. The transition rates to junior secondary school have also increased, and the gender gap has improved" ("Nigeria" 37-38). According to the World Bank's DataBank system, which provides the most up-to-date statistics on various measures of development, the gross enrollment ratio for girls in primary school has steadily increased from 30.5 in 1970 to 81.0 in 2010. Gross enrollment rates for girls in secondary school has also increased from 17.1 in 1970 to 63.1 in 2010. Although much progress has been made, work still remains to be done. The trends for girls' completion rates has fluctuated, but currently stands at 68.4 for primary school and 39.0 for secondary school as of 2009 ("Data Open Catalogue" 1).

At the core of some of Nigeria's greatest inequalities lies its most viable solution. The evidence shows that educating girls is both necessary and beneficial. Moving forward, more efforts are needed that focus on educating Nigerian girls about their identities and providing avenues for them to exercise their leadership. Doing so will provide girls with a cultural context for understanding the power of their education. The success of the Nigerian girl has always been necessary for her society's survival. Educated Nigerian girls become educated women and mothers, and women are the historical educators of the home. They pass on the basic language, skills, and values essential for maintaining the knowledge that continues to develop their society. She holds the knowledge and character that has always upheld her family and community, and is responsible for transmitting that information to the generations to come. She bridges the gap between the influences of her western and African education so she can lead her community forward. She understands that because western education is so deeply entrenched in Nigerian society, it is impossible to completely extract its influence on Nigeria from the country. Furthermore,

not every idea introduced by western education is inherently bad. It is just that the western way of development is not exclusive or superior to the acceptable methods Nigerians already had for advancing their country. Nigerian girls understand that they must find the middle ground and marry their Nigerian cultural values with their western perspective. Efforts to foster her success now are instrumental in creating the next generation of female economists, artists, and politicians. Nigeria as a nation, and Africa as a continent will be better for it.

# CONCLUSION

European colonialism reset the rules of African societies by implanting systems and values that contradicted Africans' ways of life. On the surface, pre-existing African social and political systems became subject to European models of government and education. Inwardly, African cultural values, such as gender norms, were redefined by European ideals. For the Nigerian woman in the British colonial era, this meant that her former participation in public spheres became restricted to the privacy of her home. Where she was once involved in decision-making and commerce, the arrival of the British colonial officials and their wives confined the Nigerian woman's role to the domestic space. Girlhood and adolescent girls' education, then, became a prime locus for indoctrination into British standards of middle-class femininity. Not only were girls educated exclusively in home economics (sewing, cooking, and marriage character training), they were also taught to think little of themselves and their value to society. Through girls' education, these new ideas about girls and women became institutionalized and disseminated throughout the population. This paper argues that also through education, Nigerian girls' identity can and must be restored.

British colonialism raged a particular storm against Nigeria's women, the effects of which are still eroding the fabric that knits together Nigerian society today. By maintaining leadership positions, systems, and ideas that were imposed by colonizers, Nigerian leaders have assisted the British in hindering the country's advancement. In contemporary Nigeria, women are largely unrepresented in leadership positions, and outnumbered by their male counterparts. While this phenomenon is a consequence of British colonialism and male privilege, it can also be attributed to the barriers Nigerian women experience in their youth. As girls, they are exposed to the male paradigm of leadership which discounts girls as being valuable and equally capable partners. Girls also do not receive the same access as boys to leadership training and mentoring opportunities. Furthermore, girls internalize oppressive speech which impacts their self-confidence and desire to challenge societal norms by aspiring towards leadership positions. This differential treatment of boys and girls develops into a preferential system in Nigeria that denies girls the ability to reach their full potential. Nigerian girls' success is key to rebuilding the economic, social, and political sectors of their country. Girls must have the ability to participate in a capacity that is fulfilling to themselves and beneficial for their society. Considering the role education has played in creating and exacerbating the gender gap in leadership, it is unquestionable that it would also lie at the core of the solution to this problem.

Education is crucial to a society's development because it is one of the tools by which any individual is able to improve their own life. Through formal and informal education, one learns what it takes to thrive in their environment. Both Africans and Europeans had methods of educating their youth into functional beings who would advance and develop their societies. Because of its vital role in development, education has been championed as a major solution to

poverty and underdevelopment. Girls' education, in particular, is regarded as a tool that combats many of the issues that characterize developing nations. According to international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, educated girls are vital because they change demography, help manage a nation's population, improve standards of health, and double the labor force. While these issues will certainly be alleviated with the promotion of western education for girls, the issue in Nigeria and in most parts of the world is not just about educating girls, but also empowering them to be leaders in all sectors of society. Simply providing formal western education with no application to one's culture results in educated girls who are not equipped to thrive in their society. The importance of preparing a child to thrive in their community was once prominent in African education, but European schooling has since phased out this practice. The educated Nigerian girl is then able to contribute to these westernized aspects of her society, but is ill-equipped to contribute to sustaining her culture because of the discord between the competing European and African narratives of her identity.

Here emerges the Smart Nigerian Girl who embodies everything every Nigerian girl has the potential to be. She is powerful because she possesses the knowledge and characteristics that have always and will continue to transform her society. She uses what she has learned through western education as an accessory to her way of navigating through the world as a Nigerian girl. She knows how the western system works, but is motivated by an understanding of herself that opposes the typical western narrative. She is not oppressed, but self-empowered. She is ambitious, courageous, and strong.

Nigeria's girls are the nation's most viable solution for sustainable change. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Hafsat Abiola, and Chimamanda Adichie were once Nigerian girls, who along the way

learned that they are highly capable leaders and partly-responsible for the success of their families and communities. These women have clearly played a major role in shaping Nigerian society, and have shown that sowing into the Nigerian girls' immense potential is a worthwhile investment. Many governmental and non-governmental entities, both within and outside of Nigeria, are beginning to catch on to developmental discourse that focuses on empowering the African girl-child. The Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), for example, is a non-profit organization in Lagos, Nigeria that focuses on providing leadership development to young women and creating collaborative projects aimed at removing their barriers to public participation. KIND's vision is for "an Africa where women are full participants in the continent's social, economic, and political development" (KIND 1). Through their KUDRA and JUNIOR KUDRA leadership programs, KIND has successfully impacted over 4,000 young women in five of Nigeria's six geo-political zones: proving that their impact is far-reaching and serves to unite the country. These programs equip girls (from secondary school to the university-level) with the information, tools, and life skills they need to become successful leaders at all levels in society by providing them with unparalleled internship, mentorship, and entrepreneurship opportunities. At the 2014 Women and Girls' Summit, jointly hosted by KIND, Chimdi Neliakuchukwu, a sixteen year old female student, spoke on behalf of Nigerian girls everywhere. She stated that girls desire "…a qualitative education that puts us on the platform of competitive advantage with the rest of the world, while at the same time doing all that can be done to ensure we continue to uphold the values that we as a society have known from the old days" (The Women and Girls Summit 3).

Chimdi and the millions of other Nigerian girls like her have powerful voices that must be amplified. These girls will one day become women and mothers, who are the historical educa-

tors of the home. They are the ones who pass on the basic language, skills, and values essential for maintaining the knowledge that continues to develop their society. An African proverb says that, “when women move forward, the world moves with them.” Transforming the narrative for Nigerian adolescent girls will not only lead Nigeria forward as a nation, but will also position Nigeria to be a successful example to the rest of the African continent.

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